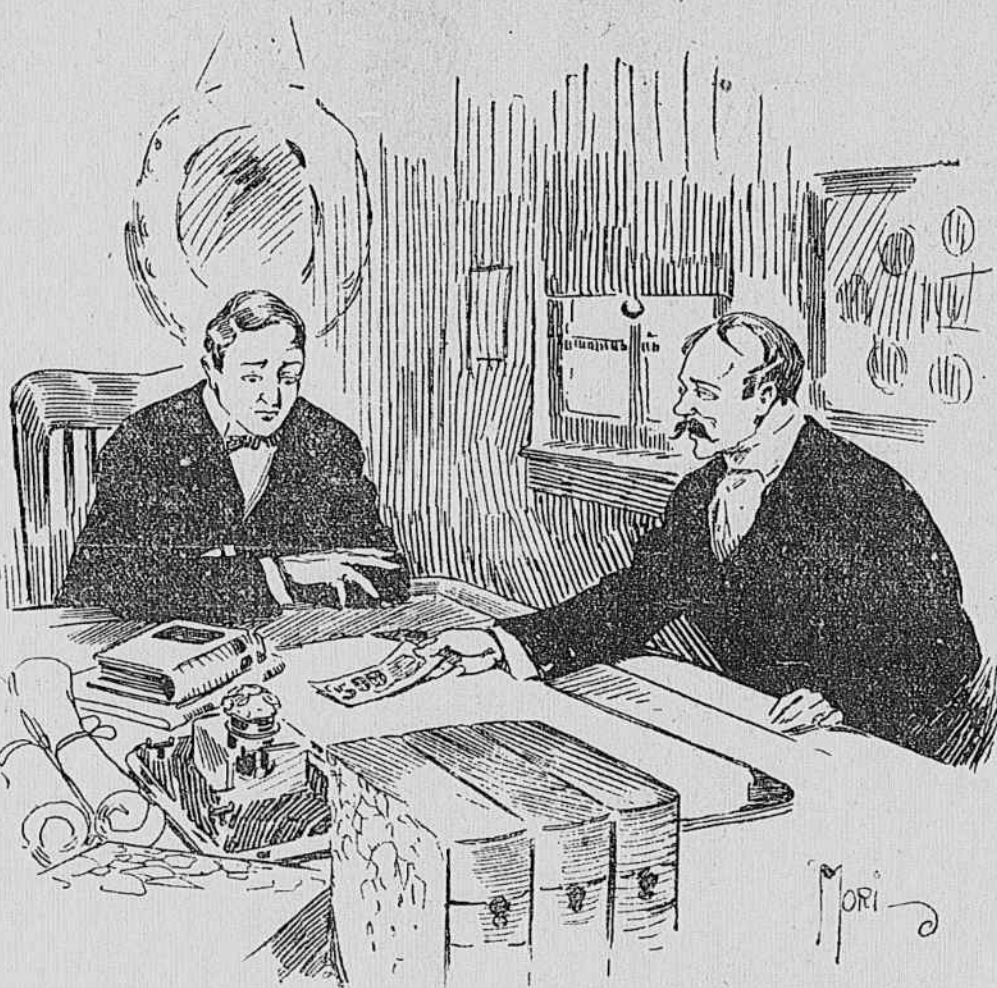
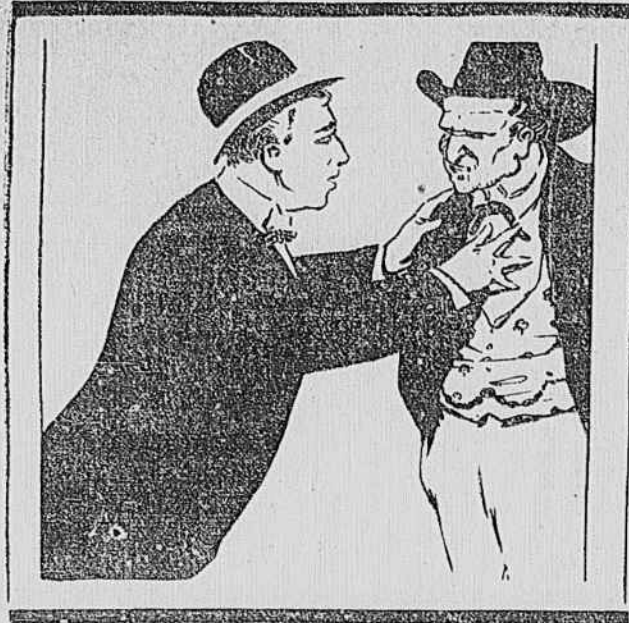


REAL ROMANCES OF THE BUSINESS WORLD

A STAR PLAY FOR A FRANCHISE



BY RICHARD SPILLANE.

Arnold sat in the Elk's club room in Chicago and reviewed the situation as he smoked an excellent cigar. This was what he had to consider: A statement from a broker that he was "wiped out," and a telegram from the New York office that he no longer had a clearing account—in other words, that he had been discharged. The statement from the broker brought a frown to Arnold's face. What a fool he had been! Twelve thousand dollars—the savings of seven or eight years—gone without even the satisfaction of seeing the same. He was playing against "the game," and he had lost. And to sacrifice his position while losing his money. He took a sip of something wet that was within easy reach, and then, dismissing the Wall Street horror and the loss of his job from his mind so far as he could, he turned his attention to the present and the future. He was 1,000 miles from home. He knew exactly what his pocketbook contained, but just for the pleasure of looking upon his total worldly wealth, he drew the pocketbook out, opened it, and spread the one lone some \$10 note on the table before him. For a minute or two Arnold looked at that note, but most of the time he was not seeing it, for his mind was busy with something away from that bill, and when the mind is uninterestingly active the brain does not seem to take in what the eye has in focus. Mechanically Arnold picked up the bill, placed it in the pocketbook, folded the book and put it away. Then he smiled, and, after lighting a fresh cigar, for the old one had gone out, he straightened up in his chair, took a long breath, and called out:

"If there anybody here who has \$500 hell venture on a real good proposition? I'll give him \$500 for his money. There's a little risk, but it's worth it."

The hum of conversation ceased. Waiters stopped in their tracks. Everybody looked at Arnold.

It seemed that there was not a sound in the room for a minute or two, but

it only was twenty or thirty seconds after his first speech that Arnold broke the silence. Then he asked:

"Is there anybody here who knows anybody who has \$500?"

No one else seemed to have a reply to make, a man in the corner spoke.

"I know an old geezer," he said, "who sometimes will let go of a few hundred if a proposition is first-class and if a man leaves a leg, an eye and an arm or two for security."

"Lead me to him," said Arnold.

If his case had not been desperate Arnold would not have accepted the conditions of the skinflint to whom he was introduced by his brother Elk. He had to go into elaborate explanations again and again, and had to give a detailed history of his life and go through a sort of civil service examination, besides signing all sorts of papers, before the old fellow would consent to finance the job. Then the money merchant insisted that Arnold report to him daily in writing as to the progress of affairs. This being agreed to, he let Arnold have \$50. The remainder was to be advanced as needed if Arnold made satisfactory headway, but the supply could be shut off at any time in the event of things taking a bad turn.

"And now," said the money man, "or the fifth or sixth time as Arnold was leaving, 'how long do you think it will take?'"

"This is the 20th of November," replied Arnold. "I have an engagement in New York on the 4th of December. I'll and you over your \$500 a month from to-day."

"I hope so; I hope so," said the old fellow. "But I am a fool to risk my money on such a wild scheme."

Arnold had a clear idea of what he was going to do, but where he was going to do it he did not determine until he was on his way to the train. He selected a small city, which may be called Stoner. That is not its name, but it is near enough. The city is not far from Chicago. Arnold had been there once or twice.

In Stoner, after he had registered

at the hotel, Arnold went to one of the merchants with whom he was acquainted.

"If you wanted something from the City Council what lawyer would you engage?" he asked.

"Jim Ducey," was the answer. "He is City Attorney and he's quite a politician."

Arnold went to Ducey and talked to him for an hour. Arnold could talk most convincingly. He did not know much about telephones, but he made Ducey think he did. He told Ducey the telephone service in the city of Stoner was getting outrageous. The price, too, was extortionate. He would give to the city a far better service at a much lower rate. He wanted a franchise to do so. He wanted Mr. Ducey's aid in obtaining this franchise. Mr. Ducey would be doing a great public service in opening the way to the new company.

Mr. Ducey was young, had some Irish

blood and took a fancy to Arnold from the start.

"I'd like to help you," he said, but being City Attorney I cannot. It pays \$600 a year and the \$50 a month comes in handy. I've two months more to serve and I want to succeed myself."

"Resign for the two months," suggested Arnold. "I'll pay you as much as the city. Run for re-election. Announce that you resigned for the two months in order to get for the city the new and cheaper and the immeasurably better telephone service."

Arnold was most persuasive, and the way he put the thing caught Ducey's fancy. It was rather slow in Stoner, anyhow, and Ducey saw a bit of excitement, so he consented to resign and become Arnold's counsel and helper.

"And now," said he, "what kind of a franchise do you want?"

"I want a franchise for Arnold, but he did not show it. He didn't know the form of franchise he needed. In

fact, he never had seen a franchise in his life, but, being resourceful, he suggested that Ducey get a copy of the one the established company had, and they could see wherein they wished to change the working of their draft.

Next Arnold had Ducey take him around and introduce him to the members of the City Council. There were fourteen of these patriots. There was a butcher, a German, among the number, who was not on friendly terms with the English language; there was a wheelwright, who was so deaf that he always guessed what people said to him, and then went along answering accordingly, and there were various other queer characters in the body. Arnold, sprightly, gay, smiling and altogether charming, got into the good grace of most of them at once and talked telephone until they got to believe the city of Stoner had been most shamefully treated by the old company and that deliverance in the person of Arnold was near at hand. Every one of the fourteen assured him of support. Of course, this was conditioned upon their careful examination of the franchise. If, however, it pleased anything Arnold promised—twelve free telephones for the city government, a 33 1/3 per cent. reduction in rates, the most improved of telephone devices, etc.—they could see no reason why the franchise should not be granted at once.

Arnold favored speed. He was most decidedly in favor of it, but there were some regulations that had to be observed. The franchise had to be read at one meeting before it could be voted on at the next.

The reading of the franchise evidently did not pass unnoticed, because a day or two later a gentleman arrived in Stoner from Chicago, and, after consultation with the local telephone manager, went to interview the various Councilmen. He was a clever gentleman, was that visitor from Chicago. He could not quite size up Mr. Arnold. They wished to know more about the wonderful automatic phone, he proposed to introduce, and the extent to which the big company was going to spread its system.

Mr. Arnold asked the fourteen Councilmen to give him the honor to be his guests on a trip to Chicago. They were delighted. It meant an excursion, with plenty to eat and drink and not a cent to pay. They went to Chicago with him and Arnold put through as clever a bluff as he ever worked in his life. He took them through the big Chicago exchange and told them that was the automatic system he proposed to install. He made the Councilmen think this was part of his system he was showing and he made the telephone people think the visitors were investigating the Chicago system in order to introduce it elsewhere.

Arnold had to draw rather liberally on his skinflint friend to meet the expenses of that Chicago trip. It is wonderful how much perfectly normal men can eat and drink and smoke and to entertain them when some one else is playing the freight. That butcher's appetite was remarkable, and considering that he could not hear a word of what was being said on the stage, it was surprising how much that wheelwright enjoyed the theatres.

That Chicago trip was so gloriously successful that Arnold wrote a highly enthusiastic letter to the money shark, Ducey, too, felt perfectly at ease. He was proud of Arnold, and rather proud of himself. They went to the Council meeting with the knowledge that they had done their work well, but when the franchise was voted on they had the shock of their lives.

Seven voted for it and seven against. It required a two-thirds vote to carry it.

Ducey seemed stunned. "Get up and say something," pleaded Arnold.

"Argue with 'em. Try to get them to reconsider."

"No, no; it's no use," replied Ducey. "Somebody has been at work and upset everything."

"Then I'll talk to them myself," declared Arnold.

"You can't. No one is allowed to speak without permission," said Ducey.

Arnold had no experience as a speaker, but he had nerve. He walked through the main aisle until he reached the clerk's desk. Then he turned. "Gentlemen," he said, "I want permission to ask some question. This matter is of vital concern to your city."

Some one put a motion that the privilege be extended, and it carried. Instantly Arnold, with his arm rest-

ing on the clerk's desk, confronted the butcher.

"Will you kindly tell me," he asked, "why you voted against this franchise?"

The butcher stammered and then in weird English made a halting explanation—that the rate—\$30 for business and \$15 a year for house service "with in the city limits"—meant nothing, as the company might consider only one small street or section within the limits and charge what it liked elsewhere.

As that was only objection? Arnold inquired, looking him in the eye. The butcher went red, but answered, "Yes."

"Mr. Ducey," ordered Arnold, "change that franchise to read 'anywhere and everywhere within the city limits.'"

Arnold got to the wheelwright next. It was a circus while it lasted, but he whipped him into line. He got two others, too, and then, after a motion to reconsider the former vote the franchise went through, 11 to 3.

Three or four days after the action of the Council Arnold received word that the Mayor desired to see him. The Mayor was a shrewd citizen. He looked Arnold over, and then, making sure the door was fastened and that no one would hear their conversation, he smilingly began talking.

"My dear Mr. Arnold," he said, "I had a visit from a gentleman the other day, and I want you to know about it. Now, this gentleman does not think well of your franchise, and he asked me to vote it. When he came in he said: 'Mr. Mayor, there are some questions men cannot be expected to agree upon. Now, for example, take the question of silver. I believe you sup-

ported Mr. Bryan. Now, sir, if you were to put 500 silver dollars in your pocket you could not go through the street without everybody knowing you had the silver. Now, as to gold, which has many advocates. Here is a \$500 bill—a gold bill. Now I lay it on your desk. If you should put that in your pocket no one could tell that you had it there. Is not that so, Mr. Mayor?"

"Now, Mr. Arnold, my visitor argued strongly against this telephone franchise which the Council passed, and he argued so well that I promised I would not sign it—mind you, I said I would not sign it."

The Mayor, to better illustrate his story, had taken the \$500 bill from his pocket, thrown it on the desk, and then picked it up and flitted it between his fingers before returning it to his pocket.

Arnold was stumped. Possibly he would have thrown a \$500 bill on the Mayor's desk to match the other if he had one, but he had not. He felt that if the other bribe was not met or exceeded the game was up. He smiled as he told the Mayor he would bring forth as "strong" an argument as possible, and then he hurried to tell Ducey of the new and surprising turn in affairs.

Ducey was raging angry. "I'll fix the old thief," he said. He shouted. Then, cooling down, he had Arnold go over the story in detail and repeat with exactness the Mayor's words.

"Clever rascal," said Ducey. "I'll tell the briber he would not sign the franchise, and I'll let him away satisfied. He did not, however, pledge himself to veto it."

Arnold had not noticed this before, and began to pluck up hope.

"Maybe he won't veto," he said.

"Ducey," said Ducey, "whose fighting blood was up, 'I'll bet my life he'll not veto it. Come with me. Let's go."

They went to the Mayor's office, but the Mayor had gone home. The Mayor lived several miles out from the office. "Get a rig," ordered Ducey. Arnold got a horse and buggy, and they drove to the Mayor's home. It was cold. Arnold did not realize how bitterly cold it was until he had been in the buggy for an hour. Ducey had gone in alone and left Arnold to suffer outside. When Ducey appeared, his face was aglow. Arnold's face, too, was aglow, but from another cause.

"How it is?" chattered Arnold.

"I've pledged my word to that thief," said Ducey. "If he vetoes this franchise I'll publish what you have told me and force you to tell the story to the grand jury. I've told him I'll camp on his trail as long as he lives. The rat showed fight, and we had it hot and heavy. He defied me to do my worst, but I've got him scared. I know. He'll earn his \$500 by not signing, and if he can get into touch with the briber and manages to drag enough wire off him to warrant it he may veto, but he won't have him foul."

Arnold did not enjoy life, the next few days. If at the next meeting of the Council the franchise was not vetoed, he would be over the Council chamber on a cold night that the Council met, but Arnold did not notice it. In fact, he premeditated freely. He had a premonition that the whole thing was going to fall; that the Mayor was going to veto it.

Half way up the stairs he got tired and sat down. There he remained throughout the session. A Councilman whose sincere regard he had won had been prompted to move to adjourn immediately after the meeting convened to renew the motion as often as feasible.

The Councilman did so at the first opportunity and the motion was defeated.

Time after time when some business had been disposed of the motion was renewed, only to be defeated by the same shocking vote.

Arnold's sufferings increased. Then a Councilman asked: "Is there any message from the Mayor?"

"Yes," replied the City Clerk. Arnold gasped.

The clerk read something about a matter foreign to the telephone business, and then the motion to adjourn came again and all voted "Aye."

Arnold drew a very long breath and then he said to the Councilmen: "I need something to steady my nerves. I never knew I had any until to-night. Some of the other gentlemen thought they'd take some, too, whether they needed it or not."

It was ten days after the Council meeting that Arnold had a call. It resulted in a firm offer of \$2,000 for his franchise. Arnold told the visitor not to bother him again unless he was ready to talk in five figures.

That same day another gentleman, representing an independent company, revisited him. He offered \$5,000. Between November 27 and December 1, Arnold's popularity seemed to increase steadily. On December 1, late in the evening, he became impatient.

"I am sick and tired of this haggling," he declared. "You've been several days coming up to the \$10,000 mark. This franchise is worth \$50,000 if it's worth a cent and you know it. But I have an engagement in New York, and I'll make this proposition to you. Accept it or decline it, for it's final. I'll take \$12,000 cash, payable to-morrow morning."

The visitor considered a half minute and then accepted.

Arnold got his \$12,000 and proceeded to Chicago. There he paid \$5,000 to the old skinflint. "May boy," said the old fellow as he took the bills, "you've kept your word. It's a month to a day. I want you to come to my house to-night. I'll back you in anything. We can plan great things and we can make a fortune."

"You'll have to excuse me," said Arnold. "I'm leaving within an hour for New York. I told you I had an engagement there on the 4th."

"Can't you postpone it?" asked the money lender.

"Not since I've said it," replied Arnold. "And besides, I don't want to. You see I'm going to be married."

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